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Testimony by William H. Sullivan, Deputy Assistant Secretary for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, before the Senate Armed Services Committee concerning the Military Assistance Program in Laos

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

I am pleased to appear as a supporting witness to Mr. Nutter to discuss the policy which underlies United States provision of assistance through the Department of Defense budget to the Governments of Vietnam and Laos. I think it is useful at the outset to stress the fundamental fact which has dominated the existence of the Indochinese states over the past 25 years. This fact is the historical ambition of the Lao Dong Party, which was originally founded by Ho Chi Minh as the Communist Party of Indochina, to control all of the territory which formerly comprised French Indochina. In modern geographic terms, this means North Vietnam, South Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia.

The second important fact which we would stress is that the Lao Dong Party has consistently received material support for this ambition from the Communist States of Europe and Asia. As the level of military action emanating from Hanoi has increased, the level of this support has also increased to the point where it can now be measured in terms which approximate \$1 billion a year. In the context of this military thrust

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from Hanoi, there are currently at least 12 divisions of the regular North Vietnamese army operating outside North Vietnamese territory and fighting against the troops of their neighbors. In this same context and over the past 12 years we estimate that some 750,000 young North Vietnamese men have been sent to their deaths in the territories of North Vietnam's neighbors.

You all know the history of United States involvement in Indochina too well to require repeating it in this statement. You are aware that when President Nixon came into office in 1969 there were over one-half million United States military men in Indochina engaged in fighting these North Vietnamese forces. You are also aware that by May 1 of this year there will be less than 70,000 American military men in that same circumstance. The basic thrust of our policy in Indochina has been to turn more and more of the burden of the struggle against the North Vietnamese over to the people directly threatened. We must do so, however, in a manner which will permit them to defend themselves and eventually to convince the leaders in Hanoi that they must accept a settlement which does not threaten North Vietnam, but which provides peace and security for the other countries on the peninsula.

President Nixon has defined our policy in terms which have become known as the Nixon Doctrine. The

essence of that Doctrine, as it specifically applies to the Indochinese states threatened by North Vietnam, is that we will provide military and economic assistance, while looking primarily to the threatened nations to provide the manpower for their own defense. This undertaking with respect to South Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia has conformed to the attitude of the previous three Administrations of the United States and was specifically enunciated at the conclusion of the Geneva Conference in 1954 when the then Under Secretary of State stipulated that the United States would view any renewal of aggression in violation of the 1954 Agreements with grave concern and as seriously threatening international peace and security.

As the aggression against South Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia has become more overt, the circumstances afflicting the victims have become more nearly identical. Each has had to recruit and support large military establishments beyond its budgetary means. Each has suffered vast dislocations of people and great damage to the economic structure of its society. Each has had to become more dependent upon external assistance to provide not only the military equipment needed to defend itself but also the economic support needed to complement that military effort.

In the case of South Vietnam, the situation is well known to this Committee and has been set forth in some detail by Mr. Nutter in his explanation of the Vietnamization program. In the case of Laos, the facts may be somewhat less familiar to this Committee, but, nevertheless, they are all basically on the public record. The fact is that at this moment there are at least 7 North Vietnamese divisions operating in Laos. Two of them, equipped with modern Soviet built tanks, 130mm field guns, modern rockets, and occasionally assisted by MIG aircraft flown from North Vietnamese fields, are operating against the Royal Lao Government forces in North Laos. The other five, similarly equipped and also deploying surface to air missiles, are operating in the south of Laos where they menace South Vietnam and Cambodia and assist in the supply of aggressive manpower and weapons against those two States.

For a small country such as Laos with less than 3 million population, such an aggressive presence would be overwhelming unless it could receive assistance from its friends and neighbors. Laos does receive such support not only from the United States but also, in lesser measure, from Japan, the United Kingdom, Australia, France and Thailand. We and these other benefactors

supply the assistance not because we are seeking to threaten North Vietnam or to dominate the Indochinese Peninsula, but because we believe that Laos has the right to be an independent and neutral nation as it has consistently proclaimed.

In the recent communique signed between President Nixon and Prime Minister Chou En-lai at Shanghai, it was stressed by the United States that the peoples of Indochina should be allowed to determine their destiny without outside intervention. It was also stated that a negotiated settlement represents the basis for the attainment of that objective. At the same time, however, it was stated that, in the absence of a negotiated settlement, the United States envisages the ultimate withdrawal of all United States forces from the region consistent with the aim of self determination for each country of Indochina.

As United States forces withdraw and, so long as North Vietnamese forces, materially supported by Communist States, threaten the self-determination of countries such as Laos, we believe it will be necessary for the United States to provide assistance which will enable these countries to survive. We do not believe that peace or justice would emerge from a situation in

which these nations of Indochina were submerged under the ambitious control of the Lao Dong Party in Hanoi. We believe that that form of outcome would assure turbulence and a continuing threat to the peace.

We therefore think it is essential that the United States Congress provide these funds which are requested in the Department of Defense budget for the service funded assistance, and which have been the subject of Mr. Nutter's presentation today. Thank you.